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## DECENTRALIZING TENDENCIES IN THE FRENCH SYSTEM OF EDUCATION

THE present critical moment in the history of France has afforded unexpected proof of the moral power of the system of education upon which the republic has spent its best energies. It is, perhaps, no exaggeration to say that France has been saved from moral ruin by the individual consciences which the schools have set free. Zola's accusations roused the sense of justice in respect to the Dreyfus case, but reiteration was needed to make it effective, and in the prolonged and often hazardous contest for revision, university men have played an important part. The *bordereau* accepted by 581 deputies, was pronounced a forgery by professors in the *École des Chartes*. Gabriel Momod, professor of history at the Sorbonne, and Albert Réville, renowned for his studies in comparative religion, exposed the flimsy nature of all the evidence against Dreyfus, and in the closing act of the tragedy, a man identified in an especial manner with primary education, has stood forth as the exponent of public integrity. Says M. Bérenger: "The razor of Colonel Henry, with a sudden stroke put an end to the hesitations of both parties into which France is divided. On one side are the nationalists, the anti-Semites, the clericals, the Jesuits; on the other, the intellectuals, the socialists, the Protestants, and the Jews. Just now the opposing parties are embodied in two men, the nationalist, Ernest Judet, and the patriot, Ferdinand Buisson."

It was at the grave of Félix Pécaut, inspector general of public instruction, and former principal of the normal school of Fontenay-aux-Roses, that the words were uttered which brought upon M. Buisson the abuse of the chief editor of the *Petit Journal*. His utterance was inspired by the warning of his lamented friend: "In your desire to save France, beware lest you destroy the conscience of France." These words indicate the purpose of the earnest men to whom the republic has committed the education

of the people; they indicate also radical changes that have taken place in the university system since its establishment. To trace these changes and to indicate their bearings is the purpose of this article.

The system comprises, in one organic whole, schools, colleges, and universities. The peculiar division into academic groups (*académies*) facilitates the administration and repeats in numerous places the dignity and state of the central authority. The rectors or chiefs of the academies are so many viceroys representing the minister, while government inspectors carry, also, to every hamlet the sense of his existence and power. As regards external form the system is one with the Imperial University of Napoleon. The survival is not strange; the university arose on the ruins of the past, supplied new teaching agencies for those destroyed at one stroke by the Revolution, and gave to a distracted people the sense of security with respect to one of their most important interests. Even the law of March 15, 1850, which was intended to restore the supremacy of the church in education did not propose to destroy, but merely to modify the organization, and the recent law reviving the universities of France was opposed chiefly from the fear that the cherished ideal of the *université* would suffer through a confusion of terms. This centralized and imposing system accords well with certain marked characteristics of the French nation. It is consistent with "that principle of reason and of culture which," says Sainte-Beuve, "has penetrated deep as a modifying element into the character of the Gallic nation," and it presents a unified ideal to a people who are strangely moved by ideals. "France," says Renan, "would fall to the lowest level, if she ceased to work for some noble purpose. Dreams are her life and her glory." The university, *the state teaching*, satisfied that dream of the nation as the unit, France, which has dazzled the minds of Frenchmen since the time of Richelieu, and maintained also the traditional principle of reason and of culture. Moreover, its dignitaries and ceremonies recalled those of the church. "The whole educational system," says an astute German critic, "was forced into the net of an administration closely coördinated and welded

together after the hierarchy of the Romish church." The system took firm hold of the nation because it did no violence either to psychological or to social conditions.

The third republic, created in a perilous moment, found in the university exactly the instrument that was needed for the educational work upon which its life seemed to depend. Without such an organization it would have been impossible to cover France with schoolhouses, as was done in a decade, and to put into effective operation a system of primary schools, opposed by the church which still retained its influence in almost every household. Napoleon, it will be remembered, had not concerned himself with primary education; this he left to the clergy as it had been heretofore, and as it continued to be through the period of the Restoration and the second empire. The first effort of the republic was to bring this department under its own control. The law passed in 1833, Guizot's law, obliging every commune to establish a public school, had failed from the want of schoolhouses and the absence of state supervision. Both these defects the republic immediately remedied. In 1878, while the war indemnity still weighed upon the government, \$23,000,000 were voted as a building fund to aid the communes; there followed in quick succession the laws making education compulsory and the schools secular, and finally prohibiting the employment of any but lay teachers. Normal colleges were established and an army of teachers, trained, resourceful, and devoted to the republic, took possession of the schools. Church schools were not suppressed, but they existed only by sufferance, while political pressure and self-interest united to overcome the religious scruples of parents and induce them to send their children to the public schools. As to higher institutions, the *lycées* or classical colleges, the university faculties, and special schools, they had long hung upon government favor, and could be readily modified to suit the current; but in respect to primary schools the government had a difficult task, for its course was opposed to the most cherished sentiments of family life. Jules Ferry, who bore the brunt and the odium of the conflict, accounted for the policy at seeming variance with the notions of liberty professed by the

dominant party. "We find ourselves," he said, "face to face with a power which intends nothing less than placing over, against, and above the right of the state and of civil society, a sort of inviolability of a religious society which recognizes neither the law nor the right of the state."

The purpose of the government to abandon imperial policies was, however, early manifest. It was reflected in the deliberations of the Superior Council, and is stamped upon innumerable official decrees. Three radical changes have already been accomplished. One of these pertains to the councils and is essentially administrative; a second affects the university faculties, and makes for intellectual freedom; the third results from the upward pressure of the primary schools and is social, or one may even say, political, in its effects.

The law reorganizing the councils was passed in 1880. The Superior Council of Public Instruction replaces the old council of the university which was formed in part by life appointments, revocable only by the emperor, and in part by annual appointments. In 1850, during the brief period of the second republic, the elective principle was introduced into this council for the apparent purpose of admitting representatives of the church. In 1852 Louis Napoleon returned again to the policy of appointment. By the law of 1880 the present republic restored and extended the elective principle, and made the council strictly professional in its membership. Its function was declared to be that of "perfecting national education," for which duty the first requisite is an understanding of the subject, possible only to those who make education their life interest. The constitution was drawn up by Jules Ferry and the commissioners appointed by the two chambers for its examination included among others, Paul Bert, Laboulaye, Hippolyte Carnot, and Barthélemy Saint-Hilaire.

The bill, as eventually passed, provided for a council of sixty members, of whom three fourths should be elected by their peers from the three teaching orders, the remaining members were to be appointed by the president of the republic upon the advice of the minister. The term of service was to be four

years, with the privilege of reëlection. The far-reaching consequences of the measure were thus summed up by its author. "From this day, which may properly be regarded as memorable, the university becomes a living body, organized and free." In its elective form the council has included almost every man of note in the educational fraternity. The influence of leading minds has thus been felt throughout the system.

The law of 1880 also extended the elective principle to the academic and departmental councils. The former are advisory bodies in each academic division, presided over by the rector, they pertain to secondary and superior education, and until the passage of the university law of 1896, formed the only bond of union between the isolated faculties of an academic district. The departmental council relates solely to primary education, and includes representatives of the civil administration and of the teaching corps. Three members are appointed by the government; these are the prefect or executive chief of the department, who is president of the council, the academic inspector of schools, who is the vice president, and two subordinate inspectors, whom the minister designates. These members, however, can hardly overawe their colleagues, of whom four are elected from the civil council of the department, and the remainder are teachers (three men and three women), elected by their fellows. In the council thus composed, political influences have their sway, but they are less powerful than in the ordinary school board of this country, from which the educational element is usually excluded.

By these changes in the councils professional independence and professional prestige have been greatly increased, but they do not strike so deep as the changes in the faculties. These indeed mark a new era. The law of 1896 was the last of a series of measures which have created fifteen distinct universities in France, or, as some prefer to say, in memory of a glorious past, rehabilitated the old universities. To appreciate the pride and enthusiasm which this measure excited and which was voiced in the inaugural ceremonies of last year, it is necessary to understand the previous condition of higher education. Education,

as a liberalizing influence, found no favor with Napoleon; he fostered special schools, military, polytechnic and others to prepare men for his service, and he decreed the rigid, preparatory system of the *lycée*, but he jealously repressed all agencies that tend to promote freedom of thought or action, disguising the poverty of higher education by the ingenious device of faculties. The decree creating these declared their purpose to be "the deepening of science and the conferring of degrees," but they were more justly characterized by M. Bréal. "Napoleon," he says, "whose conceptions assumed inevitably a hierarchical and administrative form, would probably never have created faculties of letters and of science, but that it was necessary to have some one to confer diplomas." Excepting for a brilliant service of lectures at the Sorbonne after the abdication, when the highest questions of philosophy, literature, and history were discussed before attentive audiences by Guizot, Cousin, and Villemain, the faculties of science and of letters remained sterile until the present era. The faculties of law and medicine were necessarily more active, and yet in 1875 Paul Bert lamented the dearth of equipments and of resources in these, applying the mournful words of Claude Bernard, "the laboratories of Paris are the tombs of savants." "As the consequence," he continued, "of the incessant surveillance of officials, every new doctrine, every original idea is proscribed." His words had great effect, and a commission was appointed to devise a project of reform. It was not forthcoming until 1890, and six years more elapsed before it became law, so firmly intrenched was the formal system.

Pending this measure the republic entered upon the work of infusing new life into the faculties as they existed. In all the university centers building operations began; in twelve years nearly \$23,000,000 were expended in this way, of which the cities gave about two fifths, the state the balance. In the ten years, 1878-1888, the annual appropriations for the faculties were doubled, new chairs were created, fellows (*agrégés*) and instructors were appointed to supplement the lectures of the professors, students multiplied, and the increased income from fees reduced

the burden which the state had generously assumed. In 1875 the faculties of science and of letters had no students; in 1888, as Minister Fallières recorded with great satisfaction, they numbered 3693. In the same time, the number of students in all the faculties had increased by 77 per cent. While the equipment of the faculties, their resources, and active life were thus expanded, their civil status and their professional relations were radically changed. By a decree of July 25, 1885, they were empowered to hold property, receive gifts, and manage their own estates. To this end a general council of the faculties of each academy was instituted, comprising the rector, the deans of faculties, and two delegates elected from each. Another decree of the same year extended the authority of the general council to all matters of common interest to the respective faculty groups and further created a council of each faculty to administer its affairs, subject, of course, to the state laws and decrees. The choice of deans was virtually conferred upon the faculties, the minister being authorized to make the appointment every three years from two lists furnished, the one by the individual faculty, the other by the general council of the group. These measures imparted such unity and organization to the faculties that little more was needed than to give them the legal right to the name university, at the same time restoring to the name its time-honored significance. The pith of the new law is in the first article, which declares that the several faculty corps "shall be called universities." The council general of each faculty group becomes the university council or the governing body of the university. The rector, indeed, is still the executive chief of the institution, but the new conditions draw him into closer relations with local interests. To attract students and to gain local support will naturally be his aim, since otherwise he cannot maintain the new dignities. The university will no longer look to the state for buildings, equipments, special courses, etc.; these must be provided from its own resources, that is, from the fees, which the state has relinquished, and such subsidies and benefactions as local and private interest may supply.

If stronger proofs of the decentralizing force of the new

measures are needed they are found in the activities which they have aroused. Lyons, whose university is second only to that of Paris, contributed greatly to the restoration of the old name and state. The efforts were not confined to the university circle, but were vigorously pushed by the press, the Chamber of Commerce, industrial associations, and learned societies; the people were enthused, and local and parliamentary elections turned on the pledges to support the bill. As the first fruits of the law, so ardently desired, Dr. Compayré, rector of the university, notes the gift of \$20,000 from a private source. Lille has received an equal sum for its famous medical faculty, Montpellier has been unusually favored, having received \$300,000 in a single legacy. These sums are indeed small beside the bequests that flow into our own universities, but they mark a new era in those of France. Even at Paris, where neither the university name nor the ideal which it implies has ever been entirely wanting, the new law has excited unwonted activity. The success of the measure was foreshadowed at the dedication of the new Sorbonne in 1889 and impulses from that brilliant ceremony hastened the final event. Then was born that students' association which has spread to every center and substituted the living spirit of youth for an impersonal abstraction. The university law, however, is important, not because of what it signifies for Paris, but what it signifies for France beyond the capital. It is a force directed against the domination of the Queen city. Its decentralizing effect is already measurable. In 1885 more than half the total number of university students were at Paris, in 1895 the majority had shifted to provincial centers. During that decade the increase for Paris was 37 per cent., for Lyons it was 119, for Lille 103, for Poitiers 95, and for all the provincial faculties combined 60 per cent. The minister who reports the statistics adds that the increase in the student population of the provinces has been in direct proportion to the hopes that these university groups have founded upon the pending bill. The revival of the universities has not, however, changed the general policy of the system. The university, the crown of the academic district, administers the secondary schools or *lycées*

and controls them through the degree examinations. The relation between the two is much closer than between any state university in this country and its accredited high schools. Whatever then affects the life of the French university affects the *lycées* that cluster around it. The development of specialties in the higher institutions will tend to break up the uniformity of the classical colleges. Thus the last stronghold of an artificial system which has withstood reforming efforts for nearly a century, may, at last, be overcome by a subtle natural law.

The third transformation to be noted is not embodied in a particular law, nor does it lie within the administrative sphere, nor within that of the superior institutions which exist for the few and affect the people, indirectly, if at all. It is in, and through, the primary schools that the greatest change has been wrought and its culmination is the superior primary or high schools. These originated in municipal action and it was the results achieved by schools of this class established in Paris, Havre and Lyons, the thoroughness of their scientific training, and the artistic and technical skill of their graduates that led the government to take measures for increasing the provision. There are at present about 1350 high schools with technical courses, besides twenty-two which are practical schools of industry or commerce. Although obliged to conform to certain government regulations, the high school is always started and in great measure supported by the commune. At least half of them draw their pupils from an extended area and become thus municipal boarding schools in which the children of artisans and farmers receive a non-classical, but scientific and technical training quite at variance with the *lycée* training. Their discipline is less repressive than that of the *lycées* and by the nature of their studies and the methods pursued they tend much more to the free, spontaneous exercise of the intellect.

The local activities which center in these schools are illustrated in the case of the celebrated technical school of Lyons, *École de la Martinière*, whose course has been recently revised. Strictly speaking this is not a public school as it is supported by endowments, but it is administered by a municipal committee

whose service is entirely gratuitous; in the seventy years since the foundation of the school the committee has included almost every man of note in the commercial, industrial or scientific circles of Lyons. The committee formed for revision represented the local trades and industries which must necessarily determine the technical training of the school, educational experts who considered the wider relations of the subject, and representatives of the minister mindful of the organic unities of the French system. The committee thus formed, acting, as it were, under the eye of the government, never once lost sight of the prime importance of the local interest. They deferred to larger considerations merely as a means of promoting the immediate object in view.

What is true of La Martinière is declared to be true of all the technical high schools of France; whatever success they have achieved is due not to state regulations but to special, local effort. The school of Lyons is, indeed, entirely independent of public aid, but it must be remembered that even where state appropriation is the main dependence, this, itself, is the outcome of a local tax which is no longer wrung from the people but voted freely with a clear eye to future benefits. The larger municipalities, Paris and Lyons, contribute to the state treasury more than they receive therefrom; in other words, the country shares in their abundance and their influence is proportionately increased. In these centers government control becomes merely an organizing influence whose interference with local interests would not be tolerated. "The Paris schools," says a recent report, "have the great advantage of being under the active supervision of a rich and powerful municipality, which is very jealous of its independence, and, though nominally subject to the authority of the ministries of public instruction and of commerce, is practically autonomous. Even the prefect, the official chief of a department, becomes in these powerful cities the embodiment of local purposes." Says Mr. Bodley: "I have seen the prefect surrounded by the leading citizens of Lyons, distinguished men who devote their lives to the local institutions of the second town of France, the independent spirit of which is their pride." That the local effort is not confined to

the more powerful communes is shown by the amount of money annually raised for optional school expenditures. This reached about \$4,500,000 in 1891, or 13 per cent. of all the money expended on primary schools, at least one half of the optional expenditure was made in communes other than Paris and Lyons.

It must also be considered that, by their varied programs the high schools of France tend to break up the uniformity which the classical schools have so persistently maintained, and that through the growing power of the classes from whom the students of the high schools are drawn, they are gradually infusing new ideals into the popular mind. In time, undoubtedly, they will bring the universities into touch with themselves as the high schools of our own country have done.

The movements here outlined have not originated as decentralizing measures, but simply as steps in the natural progress of the system; their larger bearing, is, however, coming to be more and more clearly recognized. It is emphasized by M. Faguet, one of the most discriminating, but earnest, advocates of the new tendencies. Says this writer: "The recent laws which have established in France the liberty of primary, secondary and superior education, are bold, decentralizing reforms." He does, indeed, qualify the statement by observing that they pertain to the intellectual rather than to the administrative or political order.

The question naturally arises whether these changes in the educational system indicate a general movement of national life. It would be presumptuous to attempt a positive answer to this inquiry, but those who follow the course of events in France are aware that decentralization is the burden of many proposed reforms, and that it has been the subject of a number of brochures which have attracted wide attention during the last three or four years. It is noticeable, farther, that the autonomy of the communes has been extended in other than educational directions by recent laws. The principle of communal liberty, guarded both by the National Assembly and the Convention, found no recognition under the empire. The reaction began in 1837, when limited power in respect to the use of local funds was restored to the

communal councils. The law of April 7, 1884, further increased the power of these councils, which, it should be remembered, are elected by universal suffrage, and also gave larger power to the mayor, who is chosen from the members of the council. The institution of permanent committees for various interests has also greatly increased the opportunity for private citizens to take part in local public affairs. This is properly regarded as a great advance, but it hardly touches the essential weakness of French democracy. In France the citizen votes, and, as a member of a council or a committee, he deliberates and advises, but as a citizen he is never called upon to administer. This is the province reserved for officials who are created by a system. First, they must have the bachelor's degree; after that everything depends upon what is known in America as "pull." Even the mayor of the principal communes is nominated by the President of the Republic, although his choice is limited to the members of the communal council. The prefect or chief of the department comes always from Paris, and is often totally ignorant of the interests which he has to administer. The citizens may take possession of him, as, according to Mr. Bodley, they do in Lyons, but in general he is an alien who simply transmits information to the central bureau at Paris and carries out the instructions which are returned therefrom.

Considering the great importance of the administrative function, both because of the power which it carries and the stimulus it gives to the individual, it would seem that the most important of the transformations in the educational system is that which gives the universities the right to manage their own affairs. Such, however, is the power of the purse that a commune which votes its own budget is already in great measure autonomous; hence, again, we may say that the high schools of France, supported as they are almost solely by the communes and managed directly in their interests, mark the highest point yet reached by the decentralizing movement.

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